BACK TO NATURE

By ROE FULKERSON

He Tried to Scream Above the Roar of the Waters.

WHEN an aspiring young author takes one of those correspondence courses in "How to write stories that sell," he can sit right down and with a freehand Spencerian movement rattle them right off so that when strange things begin to happen to the hero the reader's eyes bug out and he marvels—although the Bible distinctly says, "Marvel not." Then, when he has worked the reader up to a perfectly awful nervous state, he relieves the whole situation in a minute by letting you see that back there on page one, paragraph three, where the little row of stars was, the hero went to sleep, and all of these terrible things didn't really happen at all, and were only a dream. And you are so pleased over the matter that you forgive the author and

But that was not what this story is about. It's about the time Tom went to sleep and dreamed about all there was to the story. And the author thereof, not being a graduate of one of the schools we were just talking about, hasn't the knowledge of inside baseball or the finesse or something or other to deceive the reader; so we shall just come right out and admit at the start that the biggest part of the story was a dream.

Besides that, there isn't so much difference between reading that some fellow really dreamed and reading ordinary fiction, because ordinary fiction is nothing more nor less than that some fellow dreamed when he was awake. And remember also that when a man dreams when he is awake and puts it down on paper, he does it for money, and so gets himself into the professional ranks; and everybody knows that a man really dreams in the mud when he might is the purest amateur spirit. He doesn't do it for money or even for social. So night dreams should be more literature than day-dreams; for the taint of money about them.

Tom had been reared in the country, and had lived up there [illegible] twenty years ago, when the glittering jiggle picture shows, the rumors of salaries, and a combination for [illegible] lured him away from his boyhood [illegible] home down on the farm, as the [illegible] puts it. He got a job—or rather [illegible] a situation—in a railroad office, [illegible] he rose in due and ancient form, [illegible] story hero, from forty dollars a month [illegible] fourteen hundred a year—which sounds larger, although it won't buy any more [illegible] one hundred and sixteen dollars a month. He was [illegible] with figures, and during the ten years [illegible] employment by the company he [illegible] into a mess of them every morning at [illegible] at twelve with a cipher round his [illegible] to eat, and then was submerged again till five, when [illegible] home with a seven or a nine hooked over [illegible]

But from time [illegible] he heard the call back to the farm. It rose louder; till now, at thirty, the call was becoming [illegible] nigh irresistible. He longed to ride the dimples [illegible] face of old mother Nature with a bee, and make [illegible] laugh a lapful of onions. It was now a year and [illegible] since he married the dearest girl in the world. He [illegible] was Rose, and he liked it because it sounded [illegible] God's great out of doors. Just before his marriage [illegible] had given a man a wheelbarrow full of notes for [illegible] pay rent?" and was now living it. This was [illegible] nearest approach to country life he could see. He [illegible] a little piece of ground and was large over it, even [illegible] part the house did not cover was just the size [illegible] Bokhara rug on the floor of the general traffic [illegible] office. He took joy in this tiny back yard, and [illegible] and tended it with infinite care. He perused every [illegible] he saw on country life, and devoted much time [illegible] those parts of the advertising columns where [illegible] ginseng, and squabs grow. The stories of [illegible] grow rich out of half an acre of ground were more [illegible] to him than the most exciting detective [illegible]

The Story of Tom

NOW we have [illegible] of the preliminaries, and the story may [illegible]

He had eaten [illegible] dinner one night, and taken Mike the bull pup, and [illegible] to the back yard to water the grass. He fixed [illegible] hose firmly on the little cart, on which he had rolled [illegible] out of the cellar. He adjusted the nozzle to the [illegible] and then turned on the spigot, making a flow of [illegible] that imitated a nice shower of gentle rain. He [illegible] seated himself on the porch, with Mike between [illegible] and lit his after dinner pipe. He was leaning [illegible] contentedly in his chair and scratching Mike's [illegible] while his thoughts strayed to an expected event [illegible] family. He began to think over his lot in life and [illegible] under over the stories he had read about children [illegible] up in the hot city and becoming puny weaklings [illegible] result of lack of good fresh air. He recalled some [illegible] pictures published during the late war, of the [illegible] Cuban—reconcentrados, they called them, if [illegible] remembered right. He determined that his boy should never look like that; for he was going to get a place in the country before next summer at all hazards. [illegible] boy should have a show for his white alley! The heat reflected from the brick and mortar of the city should not cook the life out of his child!

His jaw relaxed, the pipe slid down his shirt front and landed on Mike's head, turning over as it did so. When the hot embers hit him he shook his head vigorously, sniffed once at the pipe, and looked reproachfully at his master, who snored. Mike walked down the yard looking for a shady place.

Getting the Farm

TOM and Rose were looking at the place, and found it ideal. It was not so far from town but he could make it to the office in plenty of time each morning. They were not buying from an agent, but from an owner. There were exactly six acres in the plot,—two acres wide and three acres long. A millrace made the upper boundary of the property, and it sloped from this down a hillside to the creek from which the millrace was diverted by a dam half a mile above.

The owner of the rustic old flour mill a short distance away was also owner of the property, which he agreed to sell for five thousand dollars, of which only five hundred was to be paid down and a mortgage taken for the rest. Tom hesitated only long enough to get the kind old man to allow him the privilege of putting a one-inch pipe into the millrace; for, its being higher than any of his six-acre piece, he saw great possibilities for irrigation. The old man readily consented, and the transfer was made.

He and Rose moved at once; for the property had a good two-and-a-half-story house on it.

A little more careful inspection of the property showed him that it was beautifully adapted for his purpose. If it should be divided into six square blocks, one block for each acre, the two blocks next to the millrace and the two middle blocks would be on a sloping hillside, while the creek would cut exactly through the middle of the other two blocks, leaving a flat plot of ground on the side of the creek nearest the house; while the part on the farther side of the creek sloped gently up to the main road, which was the farther boundary of the property.

Tom promptly made a map of the land and began at once to put it under cultivation. He started first, though, on the house. A careful invoice of their furniture showed that, by spreading a little, it could be made to fill up the first and second floors very nicely, and Tom took the sash out of the dormer windows on the third or attic floor and substituted boards with small holes in them. After sanding the floor, the place made an ideal pigeon loft; for there is nothing more prolific than a homer pigeon, and squabs—or "squealers," as pigeon men know them—are always salable in the market at twenty-five cents each. He bought only twenty to start with; for every well behaved pigeon is a grandparent in three months.

The house had a nice cool cellar the full size of the first floor, and here Tom made eight mushroom beds, eight by ten, buying the bricks of spawn for nine dollars to start them, knowing that these queer fungi, which come up in a single jump at night only to go down stewed in cream the next afternoon, have never been grown in quantities sufficient to supply the market demand.

He turned his attention next to the irrigation problem, and his one-inch pipe that he had been allowed to tap the millrace with was brought into the yard. In the exact center of the upper end and ten feet inside the yard he divided it into two pipes, which ran through the slope of the yard straight down almost to the creek, with nozzles at intervals, to which a hose could be attached to water his plants.

The entire two acres on the west side he put into grapes, for which he put trellises running north and south, to protect the ground between them from the sun; for most of his money was to be made from the ginseng he later planted between them. This Chinese medicine plant must have shade; for its native stamping ground—or rather rooting ground—is in the forest, and the direct rays of the sun would kill it. He put in almost two acres; for ginseng in its third year will produce in roots, plants, and seed five thousand dollars to the acre. Tom termed this patch his mortgage raiser.

The northeast acre he put into garden stuff for his own use, all except a small patch where he put in some hot frames for violets; for as long as girls live there will never be enough violets to supply the demand. As fast as one man spends all his money for them, the girl only has to switch to a new fellow, and the buying starts all over again.

The east center acre he put entirely into asparagus; for he had read where a man made five hundred dollars the first year on one acre of this plant alone, and it increases year by year—till the time the Panama Canal is open, or some one finds some one else who has seen Kelly.

He had now tilled up the four acres farthest north, and on the side of the creek next to the house he dug two pools, into which the ends of his irrigation pipes emptied, and into the pond thus made on the east side he put water lilies and other aquatic plants for the market. Obtaining a thousand brook trout fry from the Fish Commission at Washington, he dumped the little fellows into the pond; for he knew that sporty gentlemen, with the whole flock of double chins rising tier on tier out of their collars, have to pay a dollar for one of those speckled beauties at any restaurant in the Lobster Belt.

On the opposite side of the path, which ran from the house down to the rustic bridge he built across the creek, he put into that pool a nice lot of frogs. Bullfrogs will not only soothe the soul of a nature lover by their nocturnal songs, but they are ever ready to offer up their lives for their flag—which is a bit of red flannel on a fishhook. When the aforesaid life is offered up the marketman will pay thirty-five cents for the martyr, and buy as many of him as you can bring in.

Tom next put a water gate across the creek at the upper and lower borders of his property, and covered this with chicken wire to confine the ducks, of which he put twenty in the creek. Feathers are worth a dollar a duck a year, and a fat duck will almost be snatched off the market stand if it is labeled "Choice for fifty cents."

Near the fence along the road he put runs of chicken wire, and into these he put a stock of Plymouth Rock chickens and a dozen ring-necked pheasants. Pheasants' eggs are worth a quarter apiece, or when incubated under a bantam hen (a supply of which he put into the next inclosure) they are worth two dollars and a half each.

He next added five hives of bees; for bees will produce a hundred pounds of honey and a new swarm each year, and the honey is a staple with the proverbial sweet tooth at twenty cents a pound.

Figuring up the Returns

THREE years drifted by, as the novelist says; for even in a suburban home *tempus will fugit*. Tom, being a man of figures, was on the bridge that crossed the creek, taking stock, or rather making a trial balance. He counted his chickens after they had hatched and not before, and was summing up the account.

He started with the pigeons, of which he found he had produced ten thousand two hundred and forty, at twenty-five cents each, or two thousand five hundred and sixty dollars, of which sixty dollars was spent for food and repairs on the loft. His mushroom beds had produced an average of fifty dollars a bed a year, or twelve hundred dollars' worth in three years, of which two hundred dollars went for fresh spawn. He sold four hundred baskets of grapes a year, at eight cents a basket, or ninety-six dollars' worth for the three years, of

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